

**Mixed views on 'Malay rights shield'**  
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**Hazlan Zakaria**

Political analysts and experts are divided in their opinion over the formation of an umbrella body to defend Malay rights, the royalty and Islam.

Last Saturday, Perkasa chairperson Ibrahim Ali - a spokesman for the grouping - announced the formation of Majlis Perundangan Melayu (MPM) to act as a 'shield against those who question Malay rights, the royalty and Islam'.

However, many of those interviewed questioned the move by the 76 Malay NGOs, on the basis that it could be little more than shadow play to gain support for hidden agendas.

The grouping's claims that Islam, Malay rights and the royalty are being trampled upon was rubbish, particularly since the position of these are enshrined in the constitution.

However, some experts pointed out that the constitution also guarantees freedom of expression and that the NGOs have a right to voice their views. One expert defended the validity of their claims and the need to take up the 'grievances' of the Malays.

Reactions follow, with the content having been edited for language.

**Shamsul Amri Baharuddin, director, Institute of the Malay World and Civilisation**

As the Malay proverb goes, this is *menanggung di air yang keruh* (taking advantage of a confusing situation). They are making use of the 'murky waters' of the current crisis in BN and Pakatan Rakyat to further their own agenda. It is bad form, what more when the movement is spearheaded by a politician well known for his opportunistic behaviour and lack of direction, this Ibrahim Ali.

What are they defending? Islam, the Malay rulers, Malay rights? What is there to defend? (Protection of) these is already entrenched in the constitution.

They are just talking, they are not actually defending anything. It is more like an advertising campaign. They are trying to differentiate themselves from the rest of the pack to hopefully gain support for their agenda.

There is nothing to fear, the same process has been repeated a number of times, for example with the Hindu Rights Action Force previously. Same brand of firebrands. In fact, I predict that there may be more of such groupings in the future as people use issues to create space for them to manoeuvre for power.

**Khoo Kay Peng, political analyst**

They are shadow-boxing! It's a joke and a waste of time. It is as if they want to promote divisiveness. Is this the image of Islam that they want to portray? Islam is not divisive.

These Malay organisations should instead focus on fighting political corruption which is rampant and untouchable, as well as helping to ensure good governance which we sorely lack. In fact, it is the Malays who need to be protected against the predation of corrupt Malay-Muslim politicians.

They should be aware of the changing political climate. We are no longer in a day and age where the agenda of one race is on the forefront.

We are in an inclusive age. Thankfully there are opposition ideologues, Malays like (Opposition leader) Anwar Ibrahim, (his daughter and Lembah Pantai MP) Nurul Izzah and (Selangor exco) Nik Nazmi (Nik Ahmad), who understand the current scenario.

**Lim Teck Ghee, director, Centre for Policy Initiatives**

There is no empirical evidence that Malay constitutional rights are being threatened. If these rights are in fact being threatened, the existing channels such as the sultans, Umno and other Malay political bodies will be the first to call attention to it.

This grouping will play on sentiment and make ridiculous claims. Its move will create more divisiveness and ferment unrest, given its explicit racial agenda and threat to confront those it describes as 'inciting' racial tension.

It is up to the established institutions and other Malay bodies to politely point out how the MPM is hurting rather than benefitting the Malay cause.

I think the onus is on the grouping to prove that it is not looking out for its own share of Approved Permits, contracts, concessions, scholarships (for their children and relatives) or business deals. There are enough Malay and national issues for them to raise, such as corruption, nepotism, unemployment, abuse of power, and rural and urban poverty. These all have a class rather than racial basis. That would be the way forward, not by harping on Malay rights and privileges.

We also need to check on the status of the 75 NGOs. There are NGOs, and there are NGOs. Are they serious and professional organisations or fly-by-night organisations or one-person outfits? We need to ascertain if they are *bona fide*, have a track record and what their real intentions are. I am especially surprised by reports that Cuepacs is a member of MPM. They should clarify this. Why are they involved?

**Noor Sulastry Yurni Ahmad, ethnic politics expert**

I think this is an effort to bring about a solution to the conundrum currently plaguing the Malay society. The constant psychological and ideological assaults on the race and its religion have produced a situation where a segment of the populace feels it is their duty to defend their race.

There is no question of a right wing or left wing in this matter. It may seem that this grouping is Malay-biased, but there are other groups that fight for other races and communities as well. If you consider the MPM to be too right wing, then maybe we should ban all organisations with ethnic tendencies like Umno, MIC and MCA. But for the harmony of all, we should allow the various groups that are fighting for their race or communities.

I don't think that this will promote Malay extremism. It is about defending the rights of the Malay race itself. As history has shown it is a tradition going back to British times when leaders were imprisoned for daring to fight colonial occupation.

If Malaysians look at this move as something positive to help the Malays, then this will not cause any problems or instigate racial tensions. The sparks of racial tension are already

there, especially with recent developments. Efforts like these would be a salve for racial tensions and we must encourage this.

**Abdul Aziz Bari, constitutional law expert**

I have said this earlier: it is their right to do so. Whether or not it is sensible is for the people to judge. Similarly, others should be allowed to discuss the matters openly. And hopefully the authorities will be fair and consistent on this, for the constitution provides the right under Article 10.

So far these people have been organising demonstrations supporting the authorities. So it appears that they have been practising what they have been preaching. What we have seen so far is a grouping that smacks of a right wing organisation.

Anyway I do not see anybody challenging those rights as claimed by Ibrahim. To me what he calls 'questioning' is just an argument about legitimate interests; something that has been around since 1948 and was retained when we got Independence.

It is time that the Malays look at the constitution and live by it, and not make noise that does nothing but fan racial sentiments. Otherwise, it will be difficult to manage all these demands.

It is no good blaming others when it is actually down to themselves and those entrusted with the duty and powers to carry out those provisions.